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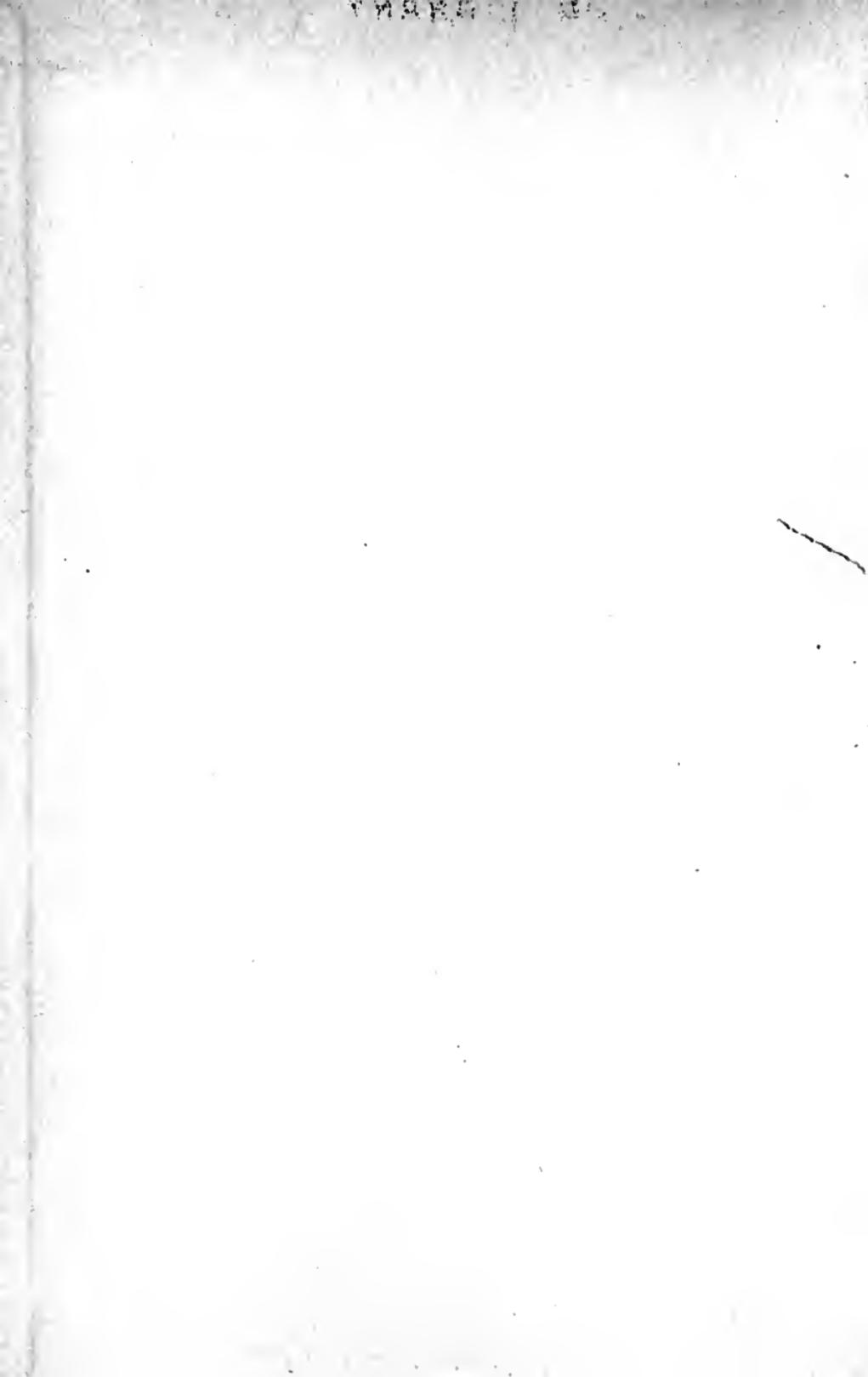


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JEAN JACQUES
ROUSSEAU

Translated by VAN HYCK BROOKS



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JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

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BY
HENRI-FRÉDERIC AMIEL

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VAN WYCK BROOKS



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C O P Y R I G H T , 1 9 2 2 , B Y
B . W . H U E B S C H , I N C .

P R I N T E D I N U . S . A .

The following discourse was delivered
at Geneva, 1878, on the occasion of the
festival commemorative of the hun-
dredth anniversary of Rousseau's death.

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

"A DAY will come, I have every confidence, when good men will bless my memory, and weep over my lot."¹

Thus wrote Rousseau, almost on the verge of the grave. After a hundred years, has the day which this illustrious and unhappy man invoked in his prayers dawned for him at last? One might well believe it at this hour when the clockmaker's son is receiving from his fatherland the most splendid public honours.

The opinion of our fellow-townsmen, however, and even of our contemporaries, is still far from being unanimous on this

¹ Third *Dialogue*.

subject. The name of Rousseau, like that of Voltaire, his unique rival, like that of most of the men of his generation, like that of the eighteenth century as a whole, is an apple of discord, involved as it is in the still pending trial of the French Revolution.

It is always difficult to be just in regard to events that have changed the face of the world. There are so many things to be weighed, it is necessary to consider the whole from a standpoint so high and so remote, that a hundred years is not enough to give us the right perspective. We are no better situated with regard to these exceptional men, beings more complex than others and so much the more difficult to understand.

Rousseau is of that number. His talent is the only thing about him which is not open to discussion. As an artist

in language he is recognized as without a peer (the first French critic of our epoch has proclaimed him the king of prose writers and Littré quotes him on every page). But the character, the philosophy, the influence of Rousseau are still matters of dispute.

By the second centenary it will not be so difficult to be just; let us at the first at least make the attempt to be so. The thought which inspires this festival and which ought to guide us, is a thought of justice. Historic justice towards a great man consists in placing him in his proper station and recognizing what his functions were.

What then shall our task be? Setting aside the eleven thousand pages of our author, and the fifty or sixty volumes on, for, or against him; letting all the old quarrels sleep, we propose to recall

in a few words the career of Rousseau, then to seek for the deep-lying reasons of his success; and finally to pass a rapid judgment upon his thought and his work. Not a panegyric, not an apotheosis, but an enumeration of the positive claims of the Genevese philosopher, that is all.

It is scarcely possible to say anything new on a subject that has been so probed to the bottom: we shall seek only for what is true.

I

“THE true at times appears improbable.”

The general task of Rousseau was of so hardy a nature as almost to approach the fabulous. It was in 1750, in the midst of a century which called itself the century of enlightenment, in the midst of the reign of Louis XV, the reign of pleasure and caprice. The whole order of things historic and secular which are summed up in the term *ancien régime* subsisted, already undermined by every sort of spiritual intemperance, solely through the intertwining of customs, interests, institutions, and habits. The general frivolity prevented people from

perceiving the social peril hidden under the shows of merry-making.

Suddenly the blast of a clarion rings out. An unknown man, with visor drawn down, bearing a shield without a motto, flings himself into the arena. He tosses his glove at all the powers of the world: at ideas, at vanities, at reigning prejudices; still more, at the great, the rich, the happy, even at the priesthood, even at the monarchy; and still more yet perhaps at men of letters, artists, journalists, philosophers, at all who control opinion.

And he is alone against them, not in the figurative sense like Voltaire, who in reality supports himself upon all the substantialities and issues his commands to an army of writers; he is alone, literally alone.

Who is this bold man? He is an in-

significant musician, poor, mannerless, without a presence, awkward in gait, and embarrassed in conversation, a beginner of mature age, come out of heaven knows what small faraway town, not even French, with an unsavoury reputation for republican and Protestant opinions.

We know the result of that reckless defiance. Far from falling overwhelmed in the encounter this seeker of adventures throve under the blows that rained upon him. During twelve years of continuous fighting, he saw victories added to victories. In twelve years he had conquered all the palms of renown; this little man had become a great power; Europe interested itself in him as in a crowned head and, conferring a royal privilege upon him, called him simply by his Christian name, Jean-Jacques.

But after the triumph, the punishment:

sixteen years of misery for the conqueror were the revenge of the conquered. Calumniated, outlawed, persecuted, hunted, deprived of an asylum for his old age, he made them listen, however, in his indignant and superb retorts, to the lion's roar. Then his life darkened, he turned against himself his loftiest gifts, gnawed away his own soul in melancholy, and consuming himself in a struggle with phantoms sank into the desolations of hypochondria. But the gloomy spleen which beset his heart left untouched the lucidity of his intellect. In the memories in which he re-lived his whole past, in the other works of the same period (*the Lettres à Malesherbes*, the *Dialogues*, the *Rêveries*) his talent remains as strong, as magisterial as ever.¹

¹ Another proof not less conclusive. When one takes from his correspondence two admirable letters, which are almost treatises, the one to Vol-

How shall we explain the career of this champion who was never vanquished, even when he was wounded? To what does he owe his success? Is it to the arms that he handled? To his manner of play? To his strategic skill? To his vehemence? Those are the reasons, no doubt. The weapon of Rousseau was an enchanted quill; his play was fast and novel; his tactics (he advanced in echelon) were perfect; his tone was commanding, his lofty assurance compelled attention at the first encounter. But does this tell the whole story?

taire on Providence (1756), and the one to d'Offreville on Scientific Ethics (1761), and compares them with two other equally important letters, that to the Marquis de Mirabeau on Legal Despotism (July, 1767), and that to an unknown correspondent on the Existence of God (January, 1769), can one doubt that an abyss of moral and mental agitation lies between the later letters and the former? Pascal had the same privilege; Tasso and Cowper, were not so fortunately spared.

Can we not find a still better reason in the ideal that everywhere shines out of the depths of that burning and magnificent eloquence? This ideal at first is ancient Rome (in the *Discours sur les sciences*); then the savage state (in the *Discours sur l'inégalité*), then the Doric republic of Lycurgus or even of Plato (in the *Discours sur l'économie politique* and the *Contrat social*), then a little modern republic, an idealized Geneva (in the famous Dedication and the *Lettre sur les spectacles*). This ideal, serious and changing, more and more fascinated his astonished audience, who clapped their hands at his unexpected sallies. Still, literary explanations are not sufficient. One must perhaps look for others. The two that are deepest seem to us to be found in the individuality of Rousseau and in his leading idea. Let us attempt to decipher the one and analyze the other.

II

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU is a psychological enigma. That which the sphinx propounded to *Œdipus* is child's-play beside this one. So at least he seems to those who try to explain a being by remaining outside of him and who, instead of penetrating him sympathetically, dissect him in a spirit which if not actually malignant is at best merely curious. Thanks to their method such observers find themselves in a blind alley.

Rousseau passionately loved being loved; he longed to be understood, and perhaps no man has taken such pains to unravel himself, to elucidate and explain himself to others. Yet for all this he de-

spaired of making himself intelligible to his contemporaries. "I do not know two Frenchmen who could reach any understanding of me, even if they wished with all their hearts to do so. . . . The primitive nature of man is too far from all their ideas. . . . The generality of men, always believing that Jean-Jacques is cast in the same mould as themselves, have made him out alternately a profound genius and an insignificant impostor; first a prodigy of virtue, then a monster of wickedness, and always the strangest and most eccentric being in the world. Nature made him anything but that. . . . He is unusual precisely because he is simple."¹

Rousseau then regarded himself as simple and natural. Such in reality he was,

¹ Second *Dialogue*.

less than he asserted, but more than is believed. For the rest, every soul when we begin to explore it is a labyrinth; yet what labyrinth is not easy to thread with Ariadne's clue? We have this precious clue for Rousseau; he has provided it himself: *Habemus confitentem*. Shall we see whither this clue leads us?

Through his ancestors, religious refugees in Geneva, Rousseau came of Gallic and even Parisian stock, revivified by the Reformation. His mother, whom he never knew, was, it appears, a distinguished woman, but his father and his immediate relatives were a little rigid, a little too settled in their ways; the gift for conduct and manners, for serious thought, for judgment, was not their forte. By heredity, then, Rousseau differed from the classic Genevese type; if the ele-

ments were the same, the proportion was different.

His organization was a singular one. All his perceptions were very delicate and fully open to the world outside him; he was a finely sensitive man. But with him sensation was dominated by desire, an intense, impetuous, impatient, burning desire. His moods were as variable as water, his temperament inflammable; he had many appetites and strong temptations; he was given to precipitate resolutions. "To become only moderately animated is not within his power; he must either be fire or ice; when he is lukewarm, he is nothing."¹ He was a man of passion. On the other hand, if nothing excited him he would fall into indolence and even apathy: "His habitual condition is and always will be an

¹ Third *Dialogue*.

inertia of spirit and a mechanical activity.”¹

We see that in Rousseau the lower nature, the animal man as it were, is robustly constituted. On the other hand, part of the spiritual man long remains dormant—common sense, reason, conscience. Like the flower of the aloe, this deepest part only tardily rises to the light.

Strange that in a young man destined to so much glory it should be the intelligence that is backward: “One would say that my heart and my head did not belong to the same individual. Feeling quicker than lightning comes to fill my heart, but instead of enlightening it burns me, dazzles me. I feel everything, and I see nothing.”²

Rousseau is always complaining that

¹ Second *Dialogue*.

² *Confessions*.

he has a slow nature and that conception is difficult to him; only with difficulty does he understand what he is taught, he lacks the gift of conversation, still more that of improvisation; he thinks only with effort, he envies the presence of mind, the ease and the rapidity of others. But this sluggish intelligence is a stubborn one and when it wishes to start it reaches its destination.

His freedom of will is equally backward; never in Rousseau did it reach full growth. Empire over self, the government of his desires, moral force were too lacking in him: "To act against my inclination was always impossible to me," he observes of himself; but against outside obstacles, against adversity, against every constraint, this will was amazing in its vigour.

A confused and half-passive aspira-

tion, meanwhile, took the place of the will and the intelligence, a tendency toward contemplation; and this musing disposition of the soul was the indestructible root of the religion of the future spiritualistic philosopher.

The really precocious thing about Rousseau was his vanity: not so much the positive need of excelling, of shining, as the embarrassment of being in the wrong, the fear of ridicule, the horror of humiliation. From that sprang the unfortunate timidity and the false shame which were the origin of all the serious faults of the child and of the man.

Even more active in him than his vanity was that mad will-o'-the-wisp, his fancy, which exaggerated, embellished, inflamed, and transfigured everything. Rousseau was to be a poet and a seer, an enthusiast, a desperate spirit. He was

a man of imagination; from that sprang his strength and his weakness.

But with him something else developed the imagination and spurred it on: sensibility. Eagerly emotional, impressionable in the extreme, always vibrant and agitated, palpitating with restlessness or hope, this heart, which everything disturbed, touched, upset or transported, quivered incessantly like a trembling leaf, shrivelled like the tissue of the sensitive-plant. Rousseau was, above everything, a man of sentiment, which is not at all the same thing as a devout or tender-hearted man.—Rearrange these concentric spheres and you have the original dowry of Jean-Jacques. What was life to make out of it?

His destiny was to be a stern one, his existence exceptional. But his little monad (to borrow the philosopher Her-

bart's theory), sent forth into the vortex of being, was to manifest an infinite number of reactions and in this way became conscious of everything it contained.

Rousseau had been badly brought up, or rather he had not been brought up at all. He never knew the sweet order of family life, nor the steady discipline of school. He never had to obey. Nearly always his environment was bad. He had been obliged to grow up at sixes and sevens. Idler and apprentice by turns, but without protection or direction, he at last broke loose from the work-room as if it were a gaol, and we see him, not yet sixteen, a wanderer on the great highways. He carried with him, along with the recollections of his childhood, the taste for music given him by his Aunt Suzon, a love of the country acquired at Bossey, a knowledge of engraving and

design learned from his master, an admiration for the ancient heroes drawn from Plutarch, a leaning toward the Romanesque caught from the *Astrée*, the impress of an austere religion, free institutions, hardy manners, an impress his little fatherland had left upon him and which was never effaced from his memory.

The world was open before him. For twenty-two years Rousseau sought his place in it. A new Gil Blas, he was successively proselyte, footman, seminarist, music master, clerk in a land-registry office, courier, teacher, inventor, secretary to an ambassador, financial clerk; during this long Odyssey he attained to a knowledge of men of different professions and many social stages; he saw all the miseries, the vices, the sufferings, the

deformities of humanity; he was able to see too the noble things, the great things, the virtuous things. He amassed a rich treasure of experiences.

But he was not merely the pupil of destiny, he also formed himself by his own energies.

Rousseau was a self-taught man. Everything he knew he acquired by his own will, without master and without aid. He gave himself what practical instruction he had in Latin, Italian, mathematics, literature, history, astronomy, the natural sciences; he took possession also of the French language which became for him a patrimony, and of the great art of writing in which he was a corypheus. It was in Savoy, from his twentieth to his twenty-eighth year, that he made his tardy studies, thanks to the in-

valuable leisure which he secured through the too seductive hospitality of Les Charmettes.

This self-instructed man forged his soul also through meditation. In Paris, during eight further years, he condensed his observations, he matured his judgments on things, he marshalled his complaints against society, he allowed the rising tide of his bitterness to increase. In 1749, the year in which *L'Esprit des lois* appeared, he at last caught a glimpse of his rôle, that of a new Timon of Athens, of a peasant from the Danube come to chastise a whole corrupt civilization and to urge his case against an entire age. The deciding crisis of his destiny, what has been called his Vision of Damascus, surprised him on the road from Vincennes and divides his life into two parts. Till then he had been the

docile sport of chance; thenceforth he was to be the child of his works.

Fame transformed his life. During his period of obscurity he consoled himself in all his misadventures with beautiful dreams and gave the rein to every caprice; till his time of heedlessness and drift was past; his character became fixed, the man wished to be worthy of his mission. The period of desperate labour began: "About everything one must think, and think again, and never have done with thinking; it is the whole secret of a good work, and it was my method,"¹ he said in his old age. During twelve years this fever, which almost deprived him of sleep, did not leave him a moment of relaxation, and masterpiece followed masterpiece. Later too, when he was being driven from city to city, one

¹ Letter to Eymar, 1774.

is amazed at the amount of work this so-called indolent man could accomplish.

At the same time his life became one of austere simplicity. To maintain perfect independence for his pen it was his choice to earn his bread by manual work. He was and remained a copier of music, at ten sous a page, and accepted all the conditions of that lowly existence: living on the fifth floor, in the household of a workingman, with common utensils, iron forks and pewter spoons, dining on two dishes, dressing like an artisan—poverty in a word, voluntary and courageous.

To this spartan frugality he united disinterestedness in every trial. He refused royal pensions, repelled the offers of his admirers, was intractable even about little gifts from his friends. The same individual who had moulded himself entirely by his own efforts and who

preferred to search two hours in a street rather than make enquiries of a passer-by was the touchiest of men where there was any question of his dignity.

It was thus that he gathered his forces and put on his breastplate, as it were, for the war which he was about to declare.

His offensive was formidable. Twenty explosive substances had been slowly accumulated under that thick shell; the fire and shot were sent forth with a violence unheard of. "Monsieur Rousseau," a great lady of his acquaintance said to him, "who would have believed such things of you?" Is it surprising that a tension like this should have left some trace in the manner of Rousseau? Carried along at the top of his energy, seeking the argument, the stroke, the blow, the word of greatest strength, he

was not always able to avoid the error of excess.

This daring aggressor was obliged also to learn the art of defense. He encountered every kind of adversary, philosophers and archbishops, academies, and consistories, parliaments and governments, even a literary king, not to mention anonymous libellers. In order to meet them he made himself a master of polemics and threw his assailants to the ground. "I have had enough of it," said King Stanislaus. "I shall never be caught that way again."¹

On the other hand, a whole retinue of noisy admirers, thoughtless well-wishers, importunate flatterers, inquisitive busy-bodies, came to besiege the eloquent bar-

¹ The withering Reply to Monseigneur de Beaumont and the *Letter to d'Alembert* are perhaps the two most skilful pieces in all the works of Jean-Jacques.

brian, the Scythian, the misanthrope whom each one aspired to civilize. How did he protect his plan, his character, and even his genius against this invasion of ill-advised benefactors? By means of his wildness, deliberately. Rousseau fled the salons and the cities and sought the rustic solitudes. There alone did he hear the inner voice; he knew what he was about when he isolated himself. Isolation, and if I may be permitted to use a neologism, insularity, was his greatest protection. Rousseau, who placed "Robinson Crusoe" before all other books, always felt the attraction of islands. No abode was more enchanting to him than the island of Saint-Pierre. After leaving it his refuge was Great Britain, but that island was too large. Several times the hermit of Montmorency took steps, not gener-

ally known, to emigrate to some island in the Mediterranean; he dreamed of Minorca, Cyprus, Corsica. Some secret sense of harmony guided them when they deposited his remains on the Isle of Poplars, at Ermenonville, and later erected his statue at Geneva on the island which bears his name. What, on the whole, is the most natural symbol for the genius of Rousseau? A volcanic isle, emerging from the blue immensity, with its plume of smoke, a girdle of sea-foam, a mantle of verdure and a crown of flowers.

A rare native endowment, an existence altogether different from that of others, were to yield a psychological product of the most singular kind.

And, on the whole, Rousseau has left upon French society an impression of strangeness. He was a being *sui generis*,

whom one does not attempt to classify. He was new, he has been called original; he was original, he has been called incomprehensible. Whatever we may wish we are obliged to reckon with him; there is in him an ascendancy to which one has to submit whatever ascendancy one's own may be.

If Rousseau is strange, it is, first of all, because of the richness of his nature. At the time of his celebrity he united in himself the sensibility of a woman, the imagination of an Oriental, the sensuality of a child, the impetuosity of a savage, the vanity of an artist, the vigour of an athlete, and the weakness of a lover. Nor is that all. The suppleness of the literary tactician and the tenacity of the dialectician were joined in him with the pride of the plebeian of genius and the

sagacity of the psychologist, and a generous passion for moral welfare agitated and inflamed the whole.

Then his contrasts rendered him still more strange. If simple folk found him gay, debonair, accommodating, expansive, people of the world declared him defiant and irritable, suspicious and ready to take umbrage. The unhappy extolled his sweetness, his compassion, his good deeds. The great complained of his impolite and almost supercilious harshness. He seemed to be made up of dissonances, moulded of disparates; but the contrasts were not contradictions, and the numberless contrasts presented by Rousseau explain themselves easily enough, as we have said, by the perpetual reaction of the individual against an environment where nothing was after his own heart. A serene impassibility amid a whirlwind

of mosquitoes is the way of the stoics; Rousseau revered the Abauzits and the Epictetuses, but he was not the man to imitate them; he was a sensitive and an impatient being, who always suffered more or less among his fellow-men, and admitted it: "I have never been really fitted for civil society where everything is constraint, obligation, duty, and my natural independence has always rendered me incapable of that self-subjection which is necessary to one who wishes to live among men."¹

His contemporaries declared that he was unlike any one else; similarly, he himself felt that he resembled no one. He concluded that he might well be the exemplar of that which he sought, the primitive man, a little deformed no doubt by the circumstances of society, but hap-

¹ Third *Rêverie*.

pily still recognizable. Thus, by good fortune, in the infinite mass of well-worn coins, common counters, meaningless tokens which the existing world offers, he found just one medal of this lost type, and he, Rousseau, held it between his hands. Imagine the happiness of the moralist-archæologist and the jealous care with which he proceeded to fondle this *unicum*, this *hapax*, in order by means of it to draw from the vanished world, of which it was like a last vestige, the greatest of possible revelations. This was the cause of the microscopic, the incessant study that Rousseau made of himself. It was not, like Montaigne, for the sole pleasure of knowing himself that he studied himself; it was for the honour of a great theory, more, it was for the salvation of a degenerate world that could not escape from decrepitude and ruin un-

less, like the giant of the fable, who had to touch earth in order to retrieve his lost strength, it returned to its original form.

Said Montaigne, "I am the stuff of my book." Rousseau might have said, "My system and myself are one and the same." He has expressly said: "I have seen many who philosophize more learnedly than I, but their philosophy, if I may so express myself, was alien to them."¹ "Whence could the painter and apologist of nature, today so despoiled and so calumniated, have drawn his model, if not from his own heart? . . . A man must paint himself in order to show us primitive man, and if the author has not been as peculiar as his books, he has never written them."² Let us give heed to

¹ Third *Rêverie*.

² Third *Dialogue*.

those words. Rousseau never wove anything but his own substance into those magnificent theories of his; they are nothing but an enlarged image of what he found in himself; a generalization of his own ego, that which whispered or murmured in the depths of his soul reaches our ear magnified a hundred times by the sonorous speaking-trumpet, may we make bold to say the aerophone of his talent? The impersonality of a Descartes or a Leibnitz is beyond Rousseau. He is, in the highest degree, a subjective thinker. How times change! What made his success, his prestige, his authority in one age is precisely what impairs them in the present generation.

III

THE individuality of Rousseau is the key to his philosophy. Of this philosophy let us recall the general features:

“Everything is good when it comes from the hands of the maker of things, everything deteriorates in the hands of man.” This aphorism, with which *Emile* opens, is the leading idea of the Genevese thinker, the pivot of his whole system. But what does he mean by Nature? Is it matter in movement, as it is defined by those materialists who also draw up the code or the system of Nature? No, Nature is the work of God, that is to say the very expression of the

All Powerful and All Good Will, the Image of the Eternal Wisdom. Thus Nature is not force or chance, it is order and goodness.

To live in conformity with nature is the maxim of Zeno; Rousseau returns to the stoic point of view, without however abandoning Theism.

Nature includes humanity; humanity is good in its origin, like the Nature of which it is an integral part. It is so constituted as to be able to achieve order and especially moral order. But being free and capable of error it can in fact, alone among all existing things, swerve aside and deteriorate.

Anterior to all degeneration is the primitive, the original state. This original state is always pure, excellent, normal. What is called the original is the natural. The natural then is in conform-

ity with its own destiny, its own law, with the divine order.

But herein lies the peril for man. Inevitably he enters society; society produces history, history engenders civilization, civilization becomes more complex age after age, social man tends to deviate from his type, like a river charged with impurities, the further away it gets from its source. It follows that civilization, so blindly admired, ought on the contrary to be detested, for, "perfecting the human reason while it deteriorates the species, rendering man evil while it renders him social,"¹ it is a disguised decadence, a gradual debasement, an ever-increasing adulteration of our race.

From this principle springs the following maxim: Everything that violates nature is evil, everything that is evil vi-

¹*Discours sur l'inégalité*, Part 1.

olates nature. Armed with this criterion, Rousseau proceeds to the pathological examination of the society which surrounds him. This is what he ascertains:

Manners are corrupted: everywhere appearance instead of reality; everywhere fraud, baseness, venality, license.

Society is vicious; everywhere secular abuses, exorbitant privileges, monstrous iniquities, legalized injustices.

The State is perverted; the advantage of the whole people is sacrificed to the interest of the few, the great machine of politics is nothing but an instrument of pressure and oppression; the right of the weak is disregarded.

The family is compromised; domestic life is at an end, gallantry is the universal practice, adultery is almost held in honour.

Education is absurd; from the cradle

it forces the mind, the heart, the character of the young through a ridiculous routine; it aspires to nothing but to inoculate the child as much as possible with the habits and prejudices of the adult.

Art is debased; it aims only to please the senses.

Literature is depraved; it does nothing but flatter frivolous tastes.

Pleasures are factitious; the only ones that we know today are those of vanity.

Philosophy has become immoral; it laughs at everything; it frees the intelligence by demolishing all the principles of conduct; it degrades man by destroying the idea of duty, sacrifice, and virtue.

Religion like everything else has been denatured; the Church has petrified it in formalities and rendered it worldly in spirit.

Thus we see the evil about us. It is immense. Where is the remedy? The remedy lies in a return to Nature. Nature truly tends to cure things, for she has in herself a *vis medicatrix* which drives her to do so, but this force operates only through the individual. Thus it is necessary for the latter to react against the society which itself, by an inverse force, tends to disfigure him. Rousseau, the intrepid *Æsculapius*, undertakes the cure of all these maladies, and points out to the sick the ways and means by which they can return to health.

He paints (in the *Nouvelle Héloïse*) pure and honest ways of life in such colours that he renders them more attractive than epicurean joys and gives his readers a thirst for virtue.

He presents (in the *Contrat social*) the theory of the natural society based

on equality, and draws the picture of a democratic régime in which respect for titles and wealth is replaced by a respect of man for man; where the insignificant, the poor, the disinherited possess, not only the religious dignity which the Church guarantees to them by virtue of their having souls, but a dignity in law by virtue of their being individuals. In the same work, he sketches the plan of a model State, based on an avowed or tacit pact between equals, in which liberty from the arbitrariness of the few is guaranteed to every citizen, through the exclusive reign of the law. From the sovereignty of the people he deduces universal suffrage and establishes it as the fundamental principle of the republic.

He draws up, in *Emile*, the plan of a normal education which should form true men and women, his regulating

maxim being this: Study Nature, respect the spontaneity of the pupil; direct little, aid much; urge them to seek, allow them to find.

He points out the superiority of music which is felt, of poetry which is sincere, of passion which is true, of literature which is frank and serious over the falsely brilliant, the artificially graceful, the superficially pathetic.

He restores their savour to simple pleasures and innocent amusements, which are within the reach of all and which conform to Nature.

In philosophy, he reveals himself as the resolute adversary of the Encyclopædists. He is a convinced defender of God, against d'Holbach; of Providence, against Voltaire; of the soul, against Lamettrie; of moral liberty, against Diderot; of disinterested virtue, against

Helvetius; of the inner spontaneity of the faculties, against Condillac; of the rights of the heart, against the dry reason extolled by Maupertuis; of the personal rights of the individual, against the communism of Morelly and the absolutism of Hobbes.

As for religion, he restores it victoriously in a society that was ashamed of it and turned every belief to derision. As Locke had done and as Kant was to do, he seeks to disengage the essence of Christianity from its later additions and superfactions; he states it afresh (*in the Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard*) in its primitive form, that is to say in accordance with the actual thought of Jesus, and speaks of the Gospel with an unction and a majesty the like of which for long years the Christian pulpit had not known.

As we see then, the return to Nature

is Rousseau's universal panacea, because Nature is the central thought of his system. A single idea suffices for everything. If our analysis is correct, we have explained the career and the success of Jean-Jacques. Let us now assume the part of the critic.

IV

THE first duty of the critic is to be just, especially when justice is difficult; and this, one is compelled to admit, is decidedly the case with Rousseau. It is a fatal privilege of this complex genius that he divides men. Passionate himself, he impasses even more those who approach him, and few indeed are indifferent to him. But friends and enemies, enthusiasts and detractors, are equally unfit to establish the truth. To take into consideration both what is good and what is bad and to pronounce with propriety in a great case, one must possess the two virtues of the arbiter, clairvoyance and

neutrality. One must first wish to be just and then place oneself in a position where one can be so. Too often people are satisfied with less. Because of this there are two kinds of criticism that equally miss the mark.

The first is the criticism that begins with a *parti pris*. Having decided in advance, it has nothing to do with justice. It is like Sainte-Hermandad, who paid no attention to facts and witnesses in a charge; it has two weights and two measures, it reproves in the prisoner at the bar the very things it forgives in its protégés; not to examine but to condemn is its point of honour. This kind of criticism has often called Rousseau to the bar; nor will it vanish from the world till it ceases to have accomplices in the human heart, which is naturally partial. We, however, shall not do it the honour

of considering it, for it is nothing but injustice prepense.

The second kind is irresponsible criticism. This decides in an off-hand fashion, without taking any precaution against itself. Now, in the spirit of the saying *De gustibus non disputandum*, it regards its tastes as reasons or its aversions as proofs; now, it ignores the information and the comparisons that history offers which alone give us the relative measure, the true measure, that is to say, of individuals and their wrongs; sometimes it exacts of a genius qualities other than its own, demanding roses from an oak-tree, figs from the apple; sometimes it presumes to judge a work from a phrase, a life from an anecdote, forgetting the saying of Richelieu that with two lines of a man's handwriting one may well have enough to hang him. This

superficial criticism does not consider itself presumptuous. It is as frequently employed as it is convenient, at least to those who exercise it. It has, however, only the appearance of justice.

Good criticism is fair criticism. This sort does not wish to condemn, but to understand; it takes account of everything; it sees things in their setting and in their proportions; it always interprets the part by the whole; it enters into the intention and the thought of men and judges each according to his kind. This is the criticism the masters practise, the Villemains and the Barantes, for example, the Sainte-Beuves and the Vinets. Rousseau, from Madame de Staël to Edgar Quinet, has more than once happily encountered it. But the well-warranted and the impartial criticism has no more silenced the

other sort than the song of the nightingale has discouraged the blackbirds. It is never superfluous, therefore, to point out misunderstandings that are born again every day. Let us be permitted to assume this humble rôle.

A general criticism of Rousseau may be ranged under four heads: his talent, his character, his life and his ideas. This last point being that which ought especially to occupy us, we shall touch on the other three only in passing and in order to note a few of those superficial views that are all too easily adopted by many persons.

The talent of the author of *Emile* is, we have said, uncontested. That is too much to assert. Irresponsible criticism has found means of carping at it. "His style," it says, "is wanting in *naïveté*, calm,

easy grace, Attic irony; Rousseau is not Amyot, Bossuet, Sévigné, nor Voltaire." No doubt, but he is Rousseau.

"He has many imperfections; he abuses the exclamation, the apostrophe, the prosopopæia; he indulges too much in hyperbole, paradox, and does not shrink from sophistry." Perhaps, but it is probably because he is passionate. In the intoxication of combat his inspiration carries him away. His subject possesses him more than he possesses his subject. "Aside from what occupies me," he says, "the universe does not exist for me." . . . "I am always afraid of giving way at the foundation," he confessed to Hume. Naturally, passion has something to expiate; what is not exaggerated and even sophistical by nature? But passion makes power. Why expect of molten lava the fresh purity of a fountain?

"He sins occasionally against taste; he reveals errors, contradictions." As many as you like, but that does not prevent him from being the most consummate, the most correct of writers and the first of prosaists; it does not alter the fact that the great river of his speech bears on its waves a multitude of truths and beauties. Thus you are deceived about the proportion of his faults. The sun has its spots, no doubt; is it any the less the day-star?

There is the same misunderstanding in regard to Rousseau's character, and for the same reason.

"How many faults he had! Inconstancy, ingratitude, irascibility, pride, self-deceit, the least inclination for self-sacrifice." Possibly, but a fair criticism makes allowance for times: the defiant attitude, for example, was an acquired trait

with Rousseau, for he was, up to the middle of his life, the most trustful of men. It distinguishes carefully between faults that harm the individual and those that injure others, and Rousseau had plenty of the former. Especially in considering faults it considers the qualities that make up for them. It will note, therefore, in the case of Rousseau, his disinterestedness, his love of justice, his generosity, kindness, tolerance, his natural piety, his unenvious admiration of his rivals. Considering everything, we find that the character of this much-decried man, without being that of a hero or a saint, was affectionate, tender-hearted, ardent and proud and that, in spite of his weaknesses, he has not so much to fear from comparisons.

“But is it possible to defend Rousseau’s private life?”

[60]

One is not concerned with defending it, one has only to be fair. Is it fair to treat Rousseau as one treats no one else? Since when has the private life been the chief measure of historic figures? Since when has the existence of man summed itself up in a single duty? Since when have people thrown stones without pity at those who accuse themselves? Since when have they struck the penitent?

Irresponsible criticism finds it quite simple to choose among all the virtues that which a man lacks, and to take this virtue as the sole measure of the man's morality; to exact, for example, of a contemporary of the Regency of Louis XV a circumspection such as even the most fastidious women did not know and which was scarcely practised by churchmen. It considers itself justified in completely altering the sense of a frank testimony by

isolating the accusing pages from the chapters that extenuate them, and the volume that contains this testimony from all the other works that explain it.

Just criticism is not able to proceed in this fashion. It recalls those two remarks of Jean Jacques: "Nothing can work so much in my disfavour as for me to be half-known."¹ "Feeling that the good was greater than the evil, I knew it was for my interest to tell everything, and I have told everything."² It can not forget "forty years of integrity and honour in difficult circumstances," for a falsehood told at sixteen of which he speaks in these words: "The weight of it unrelied has remained to this day on my conscience, and I can say that the desire to

¹ Second letter to Malesherbes.

² Fourth *Rêverie*.

deliver myself from it in some fashion has largely contributed to the resolution I have formed to write my *Confessions*.¹

A respectful criticism does not rummage among the private miseries of anyone and considers it ungenerous to abuse the imprudence of a sick man maddened by persecution, who, to appeal from his detractors to posterity, believed he was obliged to reveal even the minor errors of his youth, and has accused himself recklessly.²

¹ *Confessions*.

² It is even possible that, by a delicacy such as has hardly been attributed to him, Rousseau has, in some circumstances, accused himself for the sake of others, and especially for the sad partner of his life. George Sand, a woman herself, expressly acquiesces in his having sent his children to the foundling-hospital (see her reasons, *A propos des Charmettes*, 1863). In any case let us note a mysterious passage that has received too little attention in the *Confessions* (Book IX): "I have fulfilled

It thinks with sorrow of the blemishes upon Rousseau's life, but seeing the treatment his confessions have received it regrets no less that the friend of Moulton did not suppress in his memoirs fifty pages that nothing obliged him to deliver into such implacable hands.

An impartial criticism recalls that Rousseau publicly repented of his error, a capital error indeed, with which he had the courage to reproach himself again. It allows itself to be disarmed by such passages as these: "Readers, you may believe me in this, I foretell that whosoever has a heart and neglects such sacred duties (those of paternity) will long shed the task of expiating my faults, and my hidden weaknesses by accusing myself of very grave misdeeds of which I was incapable and which I never committed." The last words on this subject has not yet perhaps been said and will be difficult to say.

bitter tears over his error and will never be consoled.”¹ In the *Confessions* he speaks of his “acute remorse”; and elsewhere, in a very remarkable letter on family life, addressed in 1770 to a woman of the world, he interrupts himself thus: “But I who speak of the family, of children . . . Madame, pity those whom a hard fate deprives of such happiness; pity them if they are only unfortunate; pity them all the more if they are guilty. As for me, never shall people see me prevaricating, bending through any errors of my own my maxims to my conduct; never shall they see me falsifying the sacred laws of nature and of duty in order to extenuate my errors. I prefer to expiate them rather than to excuse them.”

What more can one ask? What more can honest Christian souls require? Are

¹ *Emile*, Book 1.

the errors of Rousseau the only ones that are irremissible?

Besides, it is the public life of great men that concerns history and belongs to it; and that of Rousseau was worthy of his genius and the loftiness of his principles. There are many evidences to prove how majestic was the rôle, moral, pedagogical, political, which he played during his life, the uncontested authority that was accorded to him, the religious awakening of which he was the cause in many souls, the good which he did to all those who sought direction and help from him. Personally, the man who had taken as his motto: *Vitam impendere vero*, and who had proposed to himself the most gigantic of tasks, has given a noble example of courage and independence; the champion of the people, he remained incorruptible

by any seduction and exhibited, in a state bordering on actual need, something new and remarkable, the earnestness and the dignity of the man of letters.

The life of a thinker, however, is chiefly in his ideas; let us pass to this further subject, which ought to engage us longer.

Criticism of the ideas of Rousseau is easy enough to-day.

In the first place, he began it himself. Logical and severe in every one of his writings, considered separately, his thought modifies and rectifies itself, grows in wisdom with the years and from one work to another. Thus the author revises and corrects his first ideas on property, society, liberty, the State, civil religion. His posthumous writings redress many of his earlier paradoxes, and his letters especially form a sort of perpetual commentary

which should be continually consulted by anyone who wishes to grasp his real thought as well as his true character.

During the succeeding century a whole phalanx of new sciences has arisen and drawn up the chart of the unknown seas this hardy navigator attempted. It is only since Rousseau that political economy has formulated its true laws, that the world of origins has been unearthed in every sense, for the languages, the religions, the societies, the industries, and the arts. Rousseau, whom one may regard as a pioneer in these researches (in his astonishing *Discours sur l'inégalité* he catches a glimpse, through the heavy curtain of the ages, of the prehistoric genesis of civilization), Rousseau was the first to hail all these positive discoveries and profit by them. And we must remember that, while a hundred years of tremen-

dous experience in the religious, the social, the political, the military sphere separate him from us, and we can proceed on the path of confident observation, to him nothing was possible but conjecture, presentiment and intuition.

It is nothing greatly to boast of, therefore, if we can discover gaps and errors in Rousseau's theories. Yet I can not forbear recalling a few of them.

1. Rousseau is wanting in the historic sense; but this defect he shared with the most eminent intellects of his age. It is a necessary defect, moreover, in generations, that are charged with clearing the field of history. Those who revolutionize the past are not those who understand it; to understand is almost to pardon.

2. The original goodness of the individual and his inherent liberty, favourite ideas of Rousseau, are both psychologi-

cally inexact ideas. The characteristic of the individual, as of the species, is rather to make itself free and to become virtuous; virtue and freedom do not exist until they have experienced the pains of birth. This error is of great consequence.

3. The hypothesis of the primitive isolation of human beings is not scientifically tenable. The point of departure is at least the family group.

4. The premise of a preliminary abdication of all individual rights in the social pact is dangerous; the identification of the general will with the opinion of the simple majority, the neglect of the judicial function as a regulating power, are not less so; the omnipotence of the State results, the crushing of minorities, tyranny in the economic and religious spheres. This quite Lacedemonian premise is re-

jected by modern democracies which, in a more enlightened fashion, define and limit constitutionally the rights of the State.

5. The *Emile*, a work so fresh and so bold, less radical however and less rigorous than its prototype of the thirteenth century, which remained unknown to Rousseau (I refer to the philosophical romance, the *Philosophus, Autodidactus*, the author of which was Tophäïl, one of the Arabic philosophers of Spain), the *Emile* is open to grave objections. For instance, the tutor who is indispensable to this plan of education could not exist, the environment necessary for such a scholar is not realizable; the long postponement of the moral and religious training is impossible.

6. The *Savoyard Vicar* does not grasp in all their profundity the tragic ele-

ments of the religious conscience, nor does it make room for the need of pardon, which perhaps shrank and warped his conception of Christianity.

I stop; here is enough to indicate that Rousseau is not wholly proof against criticism, even in the works where is he most in the right.

On the other hand, and to be fair, let us point out a few of the glaring errors that are often committed in regard to him.

It is usual to see in him nothing but the abstract theorist, enunciating his theses in the form of axioms and arguing them by logic and the spirit of system to their extreme consequences. A capital mistake; for aside from the man of theory there are three or four men in Rousseau. Without speaking of the man of hopes and dreams, there is the man of reality

and observation, to whom we owe so many portraits of contemporaries, ethnographic sketches, fine perceptions of children and of all sorts of things. There is the man of presentiment and foresight: did he not announce “the approaching crisis and the age of revolutions”? There is the man of exquisite judgment in peculiar and very special circumstances, as one sees him in his correspondence, which, I repeat, one cannot reread too often; for it is there one finds the most authentic Rousseau.

In addition to this, on two several occasions, Rousseau, like Plato, found himself entreated by very dissimilar peoples, the Corsicans and Poles, to draw up constitutions based on an examination of their needs. When one considers the studies by which, in 1765 and 1772, he prepared himself for this august function of the practical legislator, when one surveys the

sketches he drew up for this double task which was rendered useless by events, one becomes convinced that the theorist of popular sovereignty had also the head of a statesman.

A second error: people have misunderstood his theories themselves. The *Inégalité* the *Emile*, the *Contrat social*, for example, have been too often falsely interpreted. How? A confusion is attributed to the author which does not exist in him, that of the speculative construction of things with the actual manner in which things are done. The geometer creates the sphere by the revolution of a semi-circle about its diameter, but the turner who wishes to deliver an ivory or box-wood ball cannot content himself with a formula and proceeds in a different fashion. The concrete and the abstract, the handiwork and the theorem are

not at all the same thing. Rousseau was by no means ignorant of this, and in numerous passages he has manifested his disdain for superficial adversaries who mistook his scientific diagram for the programme of a practitioner.

This confusion has been made by the mob and sometimes even by legislative assemblies. The consequences of it in history have proved how dangerous it is.

In a recent work M. Taine (who greatly dislikes the *Contrat social*) brought forward with his usual superior powers of analysis the inconveniences of those abstract theories which, not taking into account the complexities of reality, dissolve them in a mathematical *a priori* without being able to bring to birth a living political organism. M. Taine is perfectly right in his reproaches. But there are three things we should not forget: that

the real will never be improved if the science of observation is the only one that is cultivated; that if blunt and simple propositions are only half-true they are the half-truths which alone hitherto have struck and aroused the masses; that if half-truths alone prosper it is, it appears, because the dash of error they contain renders them all the more assimilable by humanity. Let us not, therefore, speak too much ill of the idealogues and theorists, provided they are consistent. Geometrical minds and idealists, it is true, misapprehend history and deprecate the present too much; but they labour to prepare the future. All things considered, if the Auguste Comtes are immensely useful to humanity, the Platos are perhaps necessary to it. With far less tranquil grandeur and balanced wisdom than the

author of the *Phaedo*, Rousseau belongs to the same family of minds. He is a man of the ideal and of aspiration. That is not such a bad part to play; he has no reason to blush for it.

A third error is to expect of him an exact system. Nothing is farther from Rousseau than a Spinoza; he does not construct, at leisure and in silence, a cathedral of ideas. He is a battling philosopher. Philosophy is for him, as it was for everyone else in his time, not an end but a means. Rousseau is a thinker who, following his needs, becomes a fierce Cato, an indignant tribune, a sower of ideas, a discoverer of sources, always a darter of lightning, a shaker of the earth—and this rôle is as good as another.

Let us conclude our criticism. Rousseau is indubitably a genius, that is to

say a force. A force, is measured by its extent, by the number or the intensity of its effects. The best way to appreciate Jean-Jacques, therefore, will be to describe his influence.

V

THAT influence was colossal throughout the whole second half of the eighteenth century. Rousseau was the apostle of a new ideal. His cry: "Return to nature!" produced a revolution in every sphere of private and public life. This revolution presents a certain analogy with that which Athens witnessed when Socrates, returning to the point of view of the sages, those moralists of a former day, battered down the Encyclopædists of his time. Again, it resembles the Renaissance, with its return to antiquity from the inextricable forest of the Middle Ages, and the Reformation, with its return to the Bible from the midst of the infinite maremmas

of tradition. The return to the primordial, to the unchanged, is the common element in these three revolutions, all three of which reascended to the sources and the origins in order to recover the truth. The formula of Rousseau, less determinate than that of the three others, is perhaps, by way of compensation, the most comprehensive of the three.

Rousseau was the prophet of a new order of things and a new society. Adopting him as its Lycurgus, the French Revolution derived from the writings of the Genevese philosopher its creed, its motto, and that political decalogue called the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Friend and enemy regarded him as the theorist-in-chief of democracy and—a point to be noted—socialism and communism claimed him as well as republicanism.

Rousseau opened the way to the serious discussion and philosophical examination of Christianity; at the same time he divined and originated a new apologetic.

Rousseau was the reformer of the science of teaching and the inspirer, on the one hand, of the German Basedow, on the other of Pestalozzi of Zurich, the acknowledged patriarch of modern pedagogy. For this influence did not limit itself to the French-speaking countries, or even to the Latin peoples. It has been, as the historians avow (H. Ritter and Hettner, for instance), even more profound among the Germanic peoples. Kant acknowledged that he had never been moved by any work as much as by the *Emile*, and Goethe called this book the gospel of schoolmasters. Jacobi derived from Rousseau his philosophy of

feeling, while Kant drew from it the theory of Religion within the limits of Reason. Schiller, Fichte, Herbart, Schleiermacher, to mention only minds of the first order, have applauded the Genevese thinker and hailed in him the champion of the spontaneity and autonomy of the self, the vindication of the rights of the personality, for all the ages of life and all social conditions, the most powerful advocate of individualism.

This influence did not end with the eighteenth century. Rousseau has been called with good reason the precursor of the nineteenth century. He is an ancestor, he is even our chief ancestor. To convince oneself of this one has only to unite in a single cluster the innumerable lines that derive from him.

Rousseau was lavish of forms and attempts, and nothing of him has perished.

He has furnished the model of all the types of eloquence, eloquence polemical and pathetic, political and religious. He was the inventor of a new style, the skilful style, at once harmonious full of colour, passionate, methodical, in which nothing is left to chance, in which everything is connected, everything is fused and contributes to the unity of effect.

Not to speak of his activity in connection with French dramatic music,¹ he discovered as a writer any number of new veins. The picturesque, the rustic, the familiar veins, the reverie, the intimate style, the confidential manner the bourgeois idyll can be traced to him. The swallow, the white house with the green shutters, "the gold of the broom, the pur-

¹ Grétry and Gluck have consulted with profit the author of the *Devin du village*.

ple of the heather" and all the little facts of the real world were introduced through his authority into literature. He inaugurated new modes of feeling, thinking, expression; it is not too much to say that he released something in the human soul. A satirist called Socrates the enchanter of Greece; Jean-Jacques, that other enchanter, has succeeded in inoculating even our generation with his most peculiar preferences: the joys of the open field, the solitary walk, botanizing; he invented, as it were, the walking expedition and mountain-climbing. He revealed to Europe the land of lakes and valleys, of the Alps and the Jura, and brought about that attraction for Switzerland which, we see increasing every day. Literary botany and musical æsthetics date from him. Rousseau is the father of romanticism. Temperate realism and its oppo-

site sentimentalism spring equally from the dreamer of *Les Charmettes*. What a man to have been the initiator at once of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Mirabeau, Madame de Staël, Châteaubriand, Lamennais, George Sand, Pierre Leroux, Edgar Quinet, Proudhon, Xavier de Maistre and Töppfer! And who knows whether even the scientific study of the Alpine world and geology after the fashion, that is, of the Saussures, cannot be traced as much to the influence of Rousseau as to that of Haller?

With respect to ideas properly so called, almost all those of Rousseau have germinated after him; they have blossomed about us, and it is probable that of all the great innovators of the last century it is Rousseau who would find himself the least among strangers in our existing society. Meanwhile it must be

recognized that his ideas have grown old, or rather that they have been amended by experience. What separates us most profoundly from him is the fact that the word for the universal order has changed. In science as in life it is no longer Nature but Progress that explains everything. First sketched by Herder, Lessing, Turgot, Condorcet, this later conception has become, through Saint-Simon and Hegel, the favourite, the dominant idea of our epoch, and this conception appears to be the opposite of its predecessor. There is however, no contradiction between them: in fact, human nature, which is a part of general nature, being perfectible, Nature becomes Progress without ceasing to be Nature. But it is certain that the loftier of those two ideas is that of Progress, for if Progress comprises the regeneration which is the return to the

primitive, to retrogress, when it is in the direction of the good, is a manner of advancing. Besides, Nature herself, so long regarded as unchangeable, is subject to this law of Progress; for contemporary science fauna and flora, planets and suns are in metamorphosis just as civilizations are.

Such approximately are the claims of Rousseau, such are the footprints of his passage in history. Let us conclude.

VI

“UNIVERSAL HISTORY,” Schiller said, “is like the Last Judgment”—with this difference, we may add, that the latter is final, whereas historic judgment is always subject to appeal and may be annulled or revised more than once during the course of the ages.

Sixteen years after the death of Rousseau, a first judgment was pronounced upon the work of him who slept at Ermenonville. The Committee of Public Instruction of France thus expressed itself, in its report of 15 September, 1794: “The voice of a whole generation reared in his principles and as it were brought up by him, the voice of the entire Repub-

lic summons him to the Pantheon; and in this temple, erected by the nation to the great men who have served it, awaits him who, for so long, has, in a sense, had his place in the Pantheon of public opinion."

A month later, at the time of the translation to the Pantheon of the ashes of the citizen of Geneva, the first magistrate of the State affixed his seal as it were with these words to the monument of Rousseau: "The national convention wishes to discharge to the philosopher of Nature, the debt at once of the French and of humanity."

This first judgment was a solemn one, but it was that of enthusiasm. A centenary is a judgment of second instance, it represents on a larger scale a famous institution of the Egypt of the Pharaohs, the tribunal of the dead. The deceased sum-

moned to appear before it are not merely the monarchs, the pontiffs, and the other great ones of the earth, roused from their sleep, but the intellectual élite of the vanished generations, those rarely privileged beings whose names, at the end of an age, still live in the memory of men and rise above the engulfing sands of oblivion. Instead of forty judges it is a people, humanity, that sits and undertakes, for the great ones of renown, the formidable weighing of merits.

Let us imagine Jean-Jacques called to the bar of this tribunal; what would he say in his own behalf? Perhaps what he said with so much feeling in former days; “I was a man and I have erred; I have committed great sins for which I have well atoned, but the offence never approached my heart.”¹ “I have rendered

¹ Letter to Saint-Germain, 1770.

glory to God, I have spoken for the good of men; for so great a cause, who would ever refuse to suffer?"¹

And after deliberation what verdict would the tribunal render? The following perhaps:

This was an extraordinary man. There were blots and defects in his private life, gaps and contradictions in his thought, dubious veins in his character and his genius, pernicious effects in his influence. But he deplored, expiated, redeemed his errors; he sought the truth, adored the good, proclaimed the right, suffered for justice; he understood much and he achieved much; the second half of his life was devoted to the greatest causes. Let him be absolved from the evil he committed, in the name of the good which he did; let him keep his place in the

¹ Letter to Mirabeau, 7 June, 1772.

prytaneum of glorious mortals, and for him let the gate be opened once more of that hall which bears the inscription: "To the great workmen of history a thankful posterity."

If the sentence of the great Areopagus is only putative, that which our assembled people pronounces to-day has, it seems to us, so much the more significance.

It is a hundred and fifteen years since an exile said sadly: "I have striven to honour the Genevese name, I have tenderly loved my compatriots, I have neglected nothing to make myself beloved by them; I could not have failed more completely." To this generous son to whom she has never been a just mother; to the most splendid of the illustrious ones who have sprung from her breast, since Calvin was only her adopted child; to the man who has enhanced the tradi-

tions of our religious, political and moral life, and given to the heritage of her youth a universal importance and a European renown, to Jean Jacques Rousseau Geneva, his birthplace to-day renders homage.

This centennial festival, a national tribute of gratitude and admiration, should certainly weigh a little in the balances of history. Republics are ungrateful, says experience; a prophet is without honour in his own country, says the Gospel. When, therefore, at the end of a century of dispute, a calmer generation comes to place on the head of a citizen a crown of laurels and immortelles, it signifies that the legitimacy of this renown has passed beyond presumption and is, in a sense, consecrated.

This imposing festival, without precedent among us, is, moreover, for the city

of Geneva, an act of wisdom as well as an act of justice. To honour the great men, as we may see from the example of Athens, is, for a free nation, and particularly for a small republic, to render itself worthy of having them.



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